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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 009167

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SUBJECT: FRANCE AND CENTRAL AFRICA (NORTH)

REF: PARIS 9133

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Chad, where France maintains a permanent military presence, and the Central African Republic (CAR), where France is supporting military and economic reform are key countries for France's Africa policy. The crisis in Darfur has caused concern in France about additional threats to the stability of the Deby regime in Chad. France supports Deby, including in his apparent aim to win another term as President. France has glossed over the manner in which Francois Bozize came to power in Bangui, and is working with CAR on training gendarmes and providing support in the IFIs. In Cameroon, the French see President Biya as a luckluster leader but, while trying to avoid involvement in the Cameroonian dispute with Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula, are anxious to ensure that Nigeria complies with the ruling of the International Court of Justice. END SUMMARY.

CHAD

12. (C) Seeing no credible candidates among the opposition, the French see Chadian President Idriss Deby as the best hope for stability. MFA officials have made clear to us that their support for Deby would extend to supporting him when he decides to seek a further term as President. Deby's problems with poor health have occasioned periodic visits to Paris for medical treatment. Although President Chirac has offered the use of a French military hospital, Deby prefers to use the American hospital in the Paris suburb of Neuilly.

13. (C) France has maintained a permanent military base of about 700 troops in Chad for many years. The current number is just over a thousand, with French forces having been engaged in assisting NGOs providing relief efforts to refugees from Darfur. France, which according to an MFA contact, owns half of N'djamena, has been negotiating with the Chadians over the return of 90 per cent of the property as a form of assistance in kind, leaving the remainder for use by the French garrison.

14. (C) France views the crisis in Darfur (see Reftel on France and East Africa) as a threat to the stability of Chad. France sees Deby as caught between his ties to his Zaghawa kinsmen, who installed and maintained him in power and who are allied with the Darfur rebels, or acting as a national leader in the interests of all Chadians. French officials also note that Deby can not put Chad in the position of opposing the Khartoum regime.

CAR

15. (C) Francois Bozize's coup in March 2003 brought an end to uncomfortable relations between Paris and former President Felix-Ange Patasse. Patasse was variously described to us by French officials as unpredictable and unstable and his departure was no loss to the GOF. Having financially supported the CEMAC troops who had replaced the Libyans in Bangui, France sent 300 troops to CAR to provide security immediately following the coup. For several months, the GOF ducked the issue of whether Bozize should be addressed as "Mr. President," but it was always clear that as soon as neighboring African leaders, particularly Gabon's Bongo, were on board, France would treat with Bozize as de facto head of state. Meanwhile, France quietly exfiltrated Patasse's Prime Minister, Martin Ziguete who had taken refuge at the French embassy in Bangui and gave him asylum in France. At the end of July 2003, FM de Villepin visited Bozize in CAR, finally confirming France's de facto recognition.

16. (C) Despite the removal of Patasse, the French remain pessimistic about CAR. They use every opportunity to ask us to support CAR in the IFIs, notwithstanding s.508 requirements and are anxious to see the return of U.S. diplomats to Bangui. France continues to support the CEMAC deployment in CAR as well as its own military presence which is engaged in training of gendarmes.

17. (C) CAR had a brief spell in the glare of international publicity in February this year when Bozize agreed to a French request, coordinated with the USG, to welcome former Haitian President Aristide.

CAMEROON

18. (C) In September 2002, The GOF provided facilities for a discreet meeting among Nigerian President Obasanjo, Cameroonian President Biya and UNSYG Annan to discuss the disputed Bakassi peninsula. The GOF, aware that Nigeria would suspect that France favored Cameroon, took pains to ensure that there was no French involvement in the meeting. In August 2004, with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) having ruled largely in Cameroon's favor, French officials expressed concern to us over Nigeria's failure to implement the ICJ decision. The French also took the opportunity, notwithstanding their reservations about Biya's lackluster leadership, to press us on support for Cameroon in the IFIs.

19. (C) As with several other long-serving African heads of state, Biya apparently benefits from Chirac's personal support as evidenced by the premature statement of congratulations from the Elysee on Biya's October 2004 election victory even before the vote had been finalized.
Wolff